

PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, over 2 years after the defeat of health reform in Congress, many opponents of change still claim that Americans are satisfied with their health care and view Federal oversight as the first step in a Government takeover of the system. They assert that minor tinkering may be needed to shore up some of the system's weak spots, but access to and quality of care in our country are the best in the world.

If the public thinks the system isn't broken, so the thinking goes, there is no reason for lawmakers to try to fix it.

But are Americans so happy with the current state of health affairs?

Evidence from a recent survey suggests that there is still much that troubles the public about our current system, and they expect their elected representatives to help them address the problems they are experiencing.

People are confused about how the system works; they are anxious about the cost of medical care; and they don't always feel they can obtain information to help them make sound health choices, get care when they need it, and be assured of quality.

And contrary to the widely publicized view that most people think Government should not be involved in health care, a bipartisan majority of Americans feel that the Federal Government can play an active role—working with the private sector—to make health care more affordable and improve its quality.

These are the findings of a poll of American households commissioned by the National Coalition on Health Care. The bipartisan coalition, cochaired by former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, is the Nation's largest and most broadly representative alliance of large and small business, labor unions, consumer groups, religious groups, and primary care providers.

The National Coalition on Health Care's recent survey reveals a disturbing lack of confidence among the majority of Americans with the state and direction of health care. Eight out of ten agree that "there is something seriously wrong with our health care system." Less than half say they have "confidence in the health care system to take care of [them]."

Not surprisingly, the poll reveals that lower-income Americans are particularly troubled by their experiences with cost, coverage, and treatment. Perhaps more startling is the pervasive concern of middle-income Americans who also see major flaws in the system related to quality, access, and cost.

While a majority feel that their medical plan works for them, 4 in 10 report reductions in coverage. Medicare recipients are among those most satisfied and confident in their care.

Perhaps most disturbing for the Congress is the coalition's focus group's finding that Americans believe improvements in the health care system have been held hostage to partisan pol-

itics. While Americans do not want Government involved directly in their health care, they do believe that Government has a role in protecting their interests.

Americans have voiced their concerns and have asked for Government's help—not in delivering health care, but in giving them greater security about their ability to afford and retain health insurance. We should heed their call.

Last year we passed the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, which helped workers who lose or switch jobs keep their health insurance. This year, Democrats believe it makes sense to build on that success by giving working families financial assistance to help them insure their children.

These children do not come from the poorest families, for the poor have Medicaid. The vast majority of the 10.5 million uninsured children in America are sons and daughters of working parents who do not have access to affordable coverage through their workplace. Though many of these parents work 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, they are still not able to buy health insurance for their children.

Yet we know that a little financial assistance goes a long way toward covering kids and saving health care dollars and precious lives down the line. Numerous studies confirm that uninsured children don't get the cost-effective preventive care they need and end up costing the system more in the long run, through more expensive emergency room visits, hospital admissions, and preventable chronic illnesses.

The Government Accounting Office reports that uninsured children are less likely than those with coverage to get needed health and preventive care, and that the lack of such care can adversely affect children's health status throughout their lives. These children are less likely to have routine doctor visits or have a regular source of medical care, less likely to get care for injuries, see a physician if chronically ill, or get dental care, and they are less likely to be appropriately immunized to prevent childhood illnesses.

Each of us already helps pay for these children through implicit cost shifting for uncompensated care. But we pay too much, and we get far too little. How much better it would be to help families obtain insurance for their children from the start; to provide continuous, cost-effective health care from birth through age 18 so that children can grow up healthy and maximize their potential.

The Children's Health Coverage Act, S. 13, provides tax credits to help working families purchase private coverage for their uninsured children. There are many additional ideas being floated, from both sides of the aisle, to help families obtain coverage for their children. These ideas should be debated, considered, refined, and crafted into bipartisan legislation that can pass the Congress this year.

The American public wants us to act responsibly on their behalf to assure access to quality health care at a fair

cost. Now is the time to act on that charge. There is ample common ground on the issue of extending health coverage to children. Let's prove there is ample will.

TRIBUTE TO PAMELA CHURCHILL HARRIMAN

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to pay tribute to a very distinguished citizen of the world, Pamela Churchill Harriman, whose untimely death occurred yesterday in Paris, France, while she was performing her very distinguished duties as United States Ambassador to France.

Ambassador Harriman had an illustrious career. She has graced Europe, she has graced the United States, and has capped an extraordinary life with very distinguished service for the past 4 years as our Ambassador to France, dealing, in fact, with some of the most difficult problems of the world, as we have tensions between the United States and France and the problems of NATO and a great many other issues.

During the past several years, I have had the privilege to come to know Ambassador Harriman personally. I traveled to Paris in connection with my duties as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and found her knowledge, experience, and wisdom in that field to be very extensive and, candidly, it was somewhat of a surprise to find such depth and knowledge and understanding on the complicated matters which involve intelligence.

She truly had an extraordinary life. Married to Randolph Churchill, the son of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, she was privy to some of the really fascinating and great events of the era.

During the course of conversations with her, I was struck to hear her tell of being at Checkers, the home of the Prime Minister, one Sunday evening when the dinner was interrupted by a telephone call from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And she told the story about Prime Minister Winston Churchill telling the story of President Roosevelt telling to Churchill the United States was now in it with Great Britain, because the attack on Pearl Harbor had just occurred.

And then her reminiscences about the events during the war. The Churchills had a basement at No. 10 Downing Street for when the air raids came on. They had tiered bunkers. They were not set up in very elaborate fashion. She slept in the lower bunk, pregnant at the time, and Sir Winston Churchill would come in, she recounted, at 2 a.m. and snore loudly, awakening everybody in the compound.

When I heard of the news 2 days ago, I called Charge d'Affaires Donald Bandler to find out what her condition was. She finished an arduous day, was on her way for a swim in the Ritz Hotel and, before going into the water, had suffered a seizure.